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ABSTRACT

The growing complexity of urban industrial society necessitates adequate planning techniques to insure future livability, but traditional methods of training planners have emphasized technology and ignored the human element. To remedy this deficiency, training programs should be expanded to include the social and political aspects of planning. Specific additions to a planning curriculum should include human behavior and development, social psychology, organization theory, reinforcement of organizing and political skills, and planning as a social process. A period of internship for planners with supervised and instructional activities in a field agency should be mandatory. (RA)

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Paper No. 029

A SOCIAL-ACTION APPROACH FOR PLANNING EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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A SOCIAL-ACTION APPROACH FOR PLANNING EDUCATION

Planning education is at a crossroads. The midsummer issue of the AIP Journal is an excellent barometer of the ferment now brewing in our universities. Both students and faculty, concerned with the relevancy of the profession, and its ability to meet the growing needs of a complex urban society, have become increasingly dissatisfied with educational results. Practitioners, too, seem perplexed as to what is the proper scope of planning and find themselves dismayed at the current products of planning education. All the while the problems of the American City multiply and grow in defiance of the best efforts of planning. Traditional approaches to planning education, we think, contribute to this problem.[1]

Planning education can be characterized as an admixture of the philosophies of Plato, the Gestalt psychologists, and John Dewey. Its strong utopian strains and its "philosopher-king" syndrone stem from Plato;[2] its preoccupation with comprehensiveness derives from Gestalt concepts of insight and perceptual relationships of the whole providing learning characterized by an abrupt leap from chaos to order (dubbed by critics as the "aha!" phenomenon);[3] and, finally, it embraces Dewey-type notions that problem-solving activity is the core of learning.[4] This is not unlike the educational philosophy of architecture. Current notions of city planning curricula have not substantially altered this approach.

These philosophies of learning have tended to be fairly effective if one measures effectiveness in terms of the considerable technical capacities city planners have acquired. One must, however, question whether they endow planning students with an adequate understanding of the effects of the planner's remedies upon groups and individuals--particularly upon groups and individuals in positions to accept or reject the remedies. How, in other words, does the planner assess the behavioral responses to his plans.

Indeed, it is conceivable the the basic educational philosophies may in fact block the development of social capacity. Just as it has been shown that the learning of Latin may actually impede learning another language, it may be possible that the learning of some skills in planning may inhibit the effective learning of other, equally important, skills. As one example, development of skill in the use of simulation models as a tool of planning may be accompanied by the development of a mildly patronizing attitude. This may evoke hostility toward the

planner by others involved in the planning process. Even more important, the planner may not be consciously aware that this is occurring. Furthermore, the requirements for learning this technical tool may block the planner from successfully learning how to recognize and overcome such a problem.

Thus, the sophistication and superior reasoning that the technical tool may provide can vitiate the entire planning objective. Both the tool and the planner suffer from social rejection and are unable to combat it.

This paper suggests an alternative educational philosophy for planning--one which might be termed a "social-action" approach in which one builds into the planning curriculum participatory arts as well as technical arts. Indeed, where conflict between the two occurs, we would suggest that the development of social capacities is of substantially higher priority based on the premise that planning is primarily a social and political process in which the planner intervenes into a set of existing or newly constructed social networks--an intervention which carries with it implications for both the structural and the psychological dimensions of such networks.[5]

The planner does not function as an isolated and unaccountable individual, but is inevitably engaged in a collaborative effort. Planning therefore is a participatory process regardless of the setting in which it takes place. The presence of two or more people in the process generates collaboration, whether recognized or not. This we suggest is planning's dominant feature and it is only incidentally a technical task.

There is evidence that planners are becoming increasingly aware of the participatory nature of today's planning enterprises. Federal requirements, grass-roots demands for citizen participation, the development of multiple planning agencies, and the recent emergence of coalition planning suggest that participatory planning is a fact of life. Indeed, we would suggest that this has always been so but rarely acknowledged.

Recent attempts to build it into planning education have been largely idiosyncratic episodes striving for "relevance" but not really designed as part of an integrated educational process.

In approaching this new orientation to planning education we begin with a traditional outline of a planning curriculum and introduce necessary additions which a "social-action" approach would call for. We make no prejudgements as to what ought to be dropped from the traditional curriculum, so that our final result is a course of study which would easily burst the normal two-year

constraint for a masters degree program. Our own criteria for trimming arises from our particular orientation to social planning. Other criteria might pertain in other programs.

Before examining curriculum design in detail, it is important to note that we are talking directly to all planners. We are not expressing an educational philosophy which applies only to social planners or advocacy planners. Indeed, advocacy planners exhibit an equal neglect in the development of participatory skills. They tend to be armed only with a laudable social motivation and the traditional technical skills of the city planner. This has proven to be insufficient and Lisa Peattie's observations[6] on advocacy planning in many respects mirror these problems. Regardless of whether one is dealing with formal organizations (the "Establishment") or informal neighborhood groups (in current jargon "the People") an explicit recognition of role relationships and the dynamics of social interaction is essential.

THE TRADITIONAL PLANNING CURRICULUM

Shown on Figure 1 is the outline of the usual design of a planning curriculum.[7] Briefly, the course work is devoted to providing the student with the basic knowledge of urban society together with basic planning skills. It may also provide for areas of concentration or specialization at the student's discretion. How these concentrations are arranged will vary from program to program so that Figure 1 suggests only the kinds of arrangements commonly found.

Planning programs will consist of traditional didactic methods of instruction involving lectures and seminars. In addition, problem-solving techniques are used such as studios and workshops. In addition, gaming and other simulation techniques are increasingly in vogue.

A further educational device is the planning internship. Yet, this is probably one of the more vexing and confused areas of planning education. Until recently, it was more honored in the breach than in the practice. Even, today, attention is paid to it primarily because of student demands--demands stemming from a desire to "get into the community" and engage in "real" work as opposed to "academic" work.

NEW CURRICULUM FEATURES

Shown on Figure 2 is a revised curriculum design incorporating those new elements arising from the new "social-action" approach. On it can be seen that in every area of curriculum design we have added new features. The rationale and explanation of these is as follows:

a. Core Knowledge Areas

One of the difficulties of core knowledge courses is that they are included in the curriculum for rather specific and narrow reasons--they provide the student with an understanding of how land use patterns came about. Chapin's classic text provides an excellent example.[8] Consequently, the usual approach to teaching these courses leans heavily on the structural-functional tradition in the social sciences. Conceptualizations of Park and Burgess, Homer Hoyt, and Robert Haig[9] are illustrations of the material that laid the groundwork. Contemporary conceptualizations of urban structure--even though vastly more sophisticated--still follow this tradition. This proves convenient since it relates very directly to urban geography and to explaining observed regularities in land use patters.

Even to the degree that planners have become interested in the behavior of people, study of behavioral phenomena is also oriented toward observing those regular patterns that interact with the physical environment. In the early 1950's, a strong correlation was observed between land use and travel behavior and this now underlies much of transportation planning and metropolitan planning.[10] Subsequent investigations have been concerned with consumer behavior and its relation to housing, commercial development, recreation facilities, and other activities.[11] Time and activity allocations of families have been observed to explain land use determinants.[12]

Basically, this approach to the study of urban society, focuses on its implications for land use and as a consequence, overlooks those aspects of behavior which have a key bearing on planning. In short, core knowledge courses focus on the objects being planned, not on gaining insight into the complete dimensions of the planning process.[13] This is a crucial deficiency.

Most city planners are totally unprepared for engaging in a planning process which recognizes the impact of human behavior on both the goals of planning and the participatory process. They possess no skill for such engagement because they have relatively little training for the task. Those planners who do have

these skills either intuitively had them to begin with or gained them through long (and perhaps bitter) experience.

Thus, the "social-action" theory of planning education would include core knowledge courses of the kind shown in Figure 2: human behavior, personality development, and life cycle needs, especially as these relate to the planning process;[14] urban psychology including effects of urban living on behavior[15] and psychological responses to urban design elements;[16] organizational behavior especially with regard to the conditioning effects of organizations on individuals and organizational images, identities and roles;[17] group dynamics;[18] community decision-making;[19] and political behavior with specific regard for the effects of political roles and political forces on individual and group behavior.[20] All such body of theory and knowledge provide the necessary intellectual foundation for engaging in the planning process. Without such knowledge, even the most idealistically motivated advocate planner operates with severe handicaps.

It is important to realize that as the demand for greater and greater participation grows, we intrinsically become involved in a planning process far more complex than we had imagined in the past. These areas of core knowledge are the ones central to this new perception of planning. Participation cannot be understood through structural-functional conceptions of society.

b. Basic Planning Skills

City planning in the past has developed an objective-subjective duality in method. Planners have made full use of advances in the social sciences (especially economics and sociology) and have even contributed heavily to their development. While it appeared for a short period in the late 1950's and early 1960's that social science approaches to planning might supplant urban design approaches, the latter seem to have recently developed new strength and skills through strong support provided by urban renewal and the resurgence of central business district development. Thus, both skills are very much in evidence today.

Both, however, share one serious difficulty in coping with the kinds of demands now focused on the planner. Both are purely cognitive methods which seek to find the "one best solution" to community problems. The fact that physical solutions are offered to solve social problems is only a minor flaw compared to the persistent habit of developing an optimal, "best", non-negotiable solution. As much as planners exhort themselves to develop alternative plans, they seldom do, and meaningful alternatives usually arise as a result of social processes.

Another feature of this duality of method is the wide gap that still exists between the objective and subjective. Explicit synthesis of these methods is usually omitted from the educational process and left to the individual planner. In fact, of course, this synthesis seldom occurs in any serious way. Thus, for any given planning problem, different planners will come up with different "best" solutions depending not only on their differences in values, tastes, and priorities but also depending on their preferences in method. Thus, it is really difficult to assert in most complex social settings which really is the "best" solution. Who, indeed, is most rational?

Experience seems to suggest that the "best" technical solution to a problem is not necessarily the best social solution --or at least it is not necessarily the solution that can be made socially acceptable. This is partly explained by the fact that the planner's "best" solution is usually calculated in the planner's terms and is imbued with his own (or his organization's) values. The methods, in effect, are individualistic in nature. This means they ignore, in a fundamental sense, the complexity of the social process involved in arriving at social policy choices. Moreover, they tend to look at policy choices in a very narrow way and overlook the plurality and conflict of values surrounding any given situation.[21] Negotiation, bargaining, compromise, and mutual adaptation and adjustment through collective interaction comprises the real essence of the planning process. Even technically "best" solutions find it difficult to survive this process with all systems completely intact.

This means that the planner needs to be schooled in a new area of skill--planning process skills. These skills provide the planner with the means and the techniques to function effectively within planning settings that includes the participation of others. He needs to be able to apply these skills in facilitating the progress of the process. This does not imply manipulation of participants so that they come to agree with the planner. It does mean the ability to function in relation to participants so that reasonably utilitarian planning solutions are reached--group determined solutions which (1) involve all participants, (2) secure their commitment, and (3) gain their motivation to act.

The source of such skills are not new. The fields of psychology, industrial management, public administration and community organization provide substantial experimental and practical experience so that such skills can be conceptualized around a body of theory almost as well developed as the structural-functional conceptions of sociology, anthropology, and economics.[22] As shown on Figure 2, such skills can be generalized as organizing

skills, political skills, and skills related to maintaining the effective functioning of groups for problem-solving.

c. Areas of Specialization

The opportunities for the planning student to specialize in one or a number of areas of planning are numerous as Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate. Clearly, however, the amount of new material that we have introduced into the planning curriculum in the "social-action" approach suggests an entirely new area of method specialization--one which transcends previous concepts of specialization and asserts extra-technical skills. Such a method specialization would focus directly on the planner who has such varied career goals in mind as director of a planning agency, advocate planner for a neighborhood association, policy planner at the national, state or metropolitan level. Indeed, the specialization would apply to any student whose career goals extended beyond a purely technical role.

d. Methods of Instruction

An area of planning education which has languished in undeserved neglect for many years has been the concept of an intern-type learning experience. In most planning programs this had always been a euphemism for a summer job in a planning agency. No one paid too much attention to whether such a summer job was anything more than sharpening pencils. There seemed to be an implicit assumption that just by stepping inside a planning office the student was provided an educational experience.

The deepening urban crisis and student demands for relevancy has brought about a sharp reaction to this view. Programs such as those at Harvard and MIT[23] stepped into the breach to provide the student with meaningful experience, usually in disadvantaged neighborhoods or communities where it was felt that his unique talents were desperately needed. Such experiences, then, tended to focus on the advocate planner role. Meanwhile, back at the university, nobody paid too much attention to what the student was actually doing. Needless to say, some of the advocacy experiences have been very rewarding. Some, however, have been bitterly frustrating and disappointing. But good or bad--there was seldom a faculty member or other experienced person to guide the episode, relate it to a body of theory and otherwise interpret it so that it became a consciously developed part of the education process. Thus, internship is still more honored in the breach than in the practice.

On the other hand, we are suggesting a model of internship that becomes an intrinsic part of the student's planning education. Students would not go into field situations to learn analytical or design skills. Their primary goal would be to learn planning process skills--with a particular focus on interactional skills. These would include such activities as: (1) the recruitment and organization of individuals and organizations, (2) relating participants to the planning enterprise. (3) interpreting and developing communication techniques, and (4) assessing the manner in which individuals act and interact within a group.

Another key aspect of learning in the intern setting is the understanding that the planner develops of himself and the way in which his own personality affects the individuals and groups with whom he is working. This is best learned in the field and moreover, requires sensitive and skilled supervision. This is a critical dimension which has underlain the failure of many student volunteer community projects. As suggested, in many settings, a profuse display of analytical skills will not impress anyone and, in fact, may have exactly the opposite effect of arousing hostility or suspicion.

Skill in interacting with others can be learned and developed. It essentially involves understanding how others perceive the planner: (1) in relation to the position he occupies in the group (a position usually organizationally based so that others' attitudes toward the planner are colored by their attitudes toward the organization); (2) a perception of the planner in terms of his own personality; and (3) a perception of the normative aspects and expectations of role behavior.

In overseeing the student in this process, a field instructor is essential in helping the student observe interactional dynamics and making his own assessment of progress, as well as relating his field work to his other educational experience.

Such a program demands a network of relationships with planning agencies and groups that builds in an instructional process and develops mechanisms where a wide variety of planning experiences can be observed, participated in and compared by the student. This type of field instruction is not uncommon in clinical psychology, social work and psychiatry. It involves the planning agency in providing instructors and programs which are related to the university academic work. It can be pursued simultaneously with class work or be concentrated in summer programs, or both.

Moreover, procedures which permit the students to compare and cross-analyze different field experiences and different pat-

terns of participation and problem-solving cap off an intern program that becomes an integrated and vital part of the educational experience.

CONCEPTUAL BASIS OF THE SOCIAL UTILITY APPROACH

The social-action approach derives from a number of specialized orientations within sociology, political science and psychology. The work of organization theorists, group dynamics theorists, and the behavioral school of political science provide much of the conceptual underpinning. Practical applications come from the fields of industrial management, public administration and community organization.

There are more fundamental roots, however, and these should be spelled out so that what is proposed here can be understood with greater precision and with greater awareness of the large areas of uncertainity that such an approach entails.

Fundamentally, the approach assumes that social interdependence is the binding element of social order and that this interdependence manifests itself in groups and organizations. It assumes that group formation, articulation and growth are intrinsic and essential processes of societal development and that these processes are continuous and pervasive through time. It further assumes that groups pursue rational goals--rational, that is, in their own terms. It presumes that particular interests are what bring individuals to groups at the outset but that, as a result of social interaction, particular interests become "locked" into group interests--that group consciousness, group identity and group goals emerge which incorporates particular interests and at the same time transcends them[25] The approach further assumes that this is an evolutionary, developmental process and that the dynamics of the process can be observed, understood, analyzed and directed.

We proceed then not from an atomistic or individualistic base but rather from a collective base. This is not entirely unusual. Planners have seldom held to laissez-faire philosophies. But they have viewed their own role as unique, powerful and expressly individualistic. They have assumed society has the capacity to act to achieve predesigned ends, but they have presumed that designing those ends is a specialized skill delegated to a few, highly trained, individuals. They have, in effect, sold their own "Grand Designs". We are suggesting that the planning specialists' role now be shifted to one which enables and facilitates groups in developing <u>group</u> designs.[26]

A second assumption is that the individual in a community has a right and, indeed, an obligation to participate on equal footing with other participants. Group functioning is, in this sense, viewed as a pluralistic process as opposed to a structured, authoritarian or hierarchical command-response arrangement. This does not imply the absence of formal organization in structure. It does imply that, in urban planning, differences in status, power and capacity within groups arise primarily from social relations rather than some prior, fixed conception of sovereignty.[27] In effect, we are suggesting that planning can indeed be undertaken in democratic settings.

The third major assumption stems from that of psychology (and, incidentally, education) that human behavior at least to some degree, can be conditioned and that this conditioning can be externally applied from environmental factors. The social-action approach extends further and assumes that group as well as individual behavior can be conditioned. This means that group behavior can be both constrained and stimulated by environmental elements. Thus, this approach assumes that groups can be directed, managed and controlled through understanding and manipulating the environment. But it is important to recognize that some constraints on such control comes also from within the group of which the planner is a part.

This is not as Machiavellian as it may seem. Every organizational executive (public or private) is involved in attempting to manage and control the behavior of groups of people. The executive is usually also involved in imposing his own goals (or the organization's goals as he has defined them)--something we suggest the planner specifically avoid. Thus, the planner becomes an agent of professional service in a group network which defines for <u>itsef</u> its own aims and outcomes.

Clearly, we can only offer a fragmented and sketchy empirical base for such propositions. This is an avenue of research, study and experience just unfolding. The behavioral school of political science, for example, is strictly a twentieth century phenomena and the scope of its potential has yet to fully emerge. Group dynamics is a new body of theory growing out of the National Training Laboratories during World War II. Organizational theory has only recently freed itself of the normative, instrumental theories of industrialists so that emerging social psychological approaches have yet to crystallize into a unified body of theory.

Nevertheless, we feel that enough evidence is available, as sketchy as it is, to begin experimenting with this approach. Caution dictates that continual research and evaluation is critical.

But it does suggest a real alternative approach to planning education which would seem to square with the demands and realities of societal decision-making.

In short, we are suggesting that the principal traditional modes of understanding society (i.e.: structural-functional and historical-cultural approaches) provide only incomplete guides and benchmarks and that behavioral-process bodies of knowledge are now a basic need in planning education.

CONCLUSION

In this new view of planning education, it is important to note that we have not consciously rejected the old philosophies (although we strongly suspect that Plato has become lost by the wayside[28]). In emphasizing the social and participatory processes of planning, we in no way mean to demean the analytical or design methods that have developed within the profession. We do suggest, however, that planning's exclusive preoccupation with these methods is, in large degree, responsible for many of planning's problems today. We can no longer ignore the development of meaningful participatory mechanisms. The place to begin reforming our approaches to planning lies fundamentally in our educational philosophies and background theory concerning these mechanisms.

Furthermore, it is important to note that with a shift in philosophy, there is a subtle shift in the goals of a planning education. We have become less interested in producing planners capable of designing technically superior plans--these are the plans that gather dust on bookshelves. With this shift, we are now focused on the goal of producing planners who can design a superior planning process. In many respects, this is a new and vastly more complex task but one, in the final analysis, we believe will lead to more conscious and effective management of purposeful and beneficial social change in our urban communities.

FIGURE 1

DESIGN OF A TRADITIONAL PLANNING CURRICULUM

CORE KNOWLEDGE AREAS

Structural Knowledge of Urban Society
- Urban Sociology
- Urban Geography and Ecology
- Urban Economics
- Urban Governmental Structure

Process Knowledge of Urban Society
- Historical Development Processes
- Travel Behavior
- Consumer Behavior
- Activity Patterns

BASIC PLANNING SKILLS

Objective Analytical Skills
- Scientific Method & Philosop:
- Operations Research & Math
- Models and Simulation
- Cost/Benefit Analysis
- Programming and Budgeting

Subjective Design
- Land Use Arrangements
- Site Planning & Engineering
- Urban Design
- Master Plan Design

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Broad Method Specialization
- Research
- Design
- Administration

Scalar Specialization
- Neighborhood, District
- City, Urban Area
- Metropolitan, State
- Regional, National

Functional Specialization
- Transportation
- Housing & Urban Planning
- Health Planning
- School Planning
- Social Planning

METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

Didactic
- Classroom lectures
- Seminars

Problem-Solving
- Studios
- Workshops
- Game Techniques

Internship
- Summer job or Volunteer work in a planning setting

FIGURE 2

A PLANNING CURRICULUM BASED ON A SOCIAL-ACTION PHILOSOPHY

CORE KNOWLEDGE AREAS

Structural Knowledge of Urban Society
Urban Sociology
Urban Geography and Ecology
Urban Economics
Urban Governmental Structure

Process Knowledge of Urban Society
Historical Development Processes
Travel Behavior
Consumer Behavior
Activity Patterns

Human Behavior and Development
Human Behavior and Personality Development
Urban Psychology
Organization Theory
Group Dynamics
Community Decision-Making
Political Behavior

BASIC PLANNING SKILLS

Objective Analytical Skills
Scientific Method & Philoso
Operations Research & Math
Models and Simulation
Cost/Benefit Analysis
Programming & Budgeting

Subjective Design Skills
Land Use Arrangements
Site Planning & Engineering
Urban Design
Master Plan Design

Planning Process Skills
Organizing Skills
Political Skills
Group Functioning Skills

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Broad Method Specialization
Research
Design
Administration

Planning Process

Scalar Specialization
Neighborhood, District
City, Urban Area
Metropolitan, State
Regional, National

Functional Specialization
Transportation
Housing & Urban Renewal
Health Planning
School Planning
Social Planning

METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

Didactic
Classroom lectures
Seminars

Problem-Solving
Studios
Workshops
Gaming Techniques

Internship
Supervised and Instructional Activities in a Field Agency

FOOTNOTES

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FOOTNOTES (Continued)

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FOOTNOTES (Continued)

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